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The Weekly Reader

Teaching and Learning Center (TLC)

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# True-False Test Time!

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Teaching and Learning Center

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# The Weekly Reader

Teaching and Learning Center, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

## UpComing Sessions

Go2Knowledge  
Group 4/2

Square Foot  
Gardening 4/4

Hands-On  
Photography 4/9

MOOCs 4/11

Cooking With  
Chef Kelly 4/11

Blackboard  
Training—  
various times

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## True-False Test Time! (50% Chance of Getting the Right Answer)

This is a true-false test for faculty. For each statement, decide whether the statement is true or false. Answers, and some discussion, at the end. No peeking!

1. "Hard courses weed out weak students. When students fail, it is primarily due to inability, weak preparation, or lack of effort."

2. "Traditional methods of instruction offer effective ways of teaching content to undergraduates. Modes that pamper students teach less."

3. "Massive grade inflation is a corruption of standards. Unusually high average grades are the result of faculty giving unjustified grades."

4. "Students should come to us knowing how to read, write, and do essay and multiple-choice questions."

5. "Traditional methods of instruction are unbiased and equally fair to a range of diverse students of good ability."

6. "It is essential that students hand in papers on time and take exams on time. Giving them flexibility and a second

chance is pampering students."

7. "If we cover more content, the students will learn more content."

8. "A good, clear argument in plain English can be understood by any bright student who applies herself."

9. "Without further study, faculty know enough to revise their courses, and departments know enough to revise their curricula." Course and curricular revision are primarily about what content to cover in what courses."

These questions come from Craig E. Nelson of Indiana University, Chapter 10-- "Dysfunctional Illusions of Rigor: Lessons From the Scholarship of Teaching," in *To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development, Volume 28*, Linda B. Nilson, editor and Judith E. Miller, associate editor (Jossey-Bass, 2010).

According to Nelson, the answer to each question

is "false." He cites various studies to make that argument. Here is his explanation of number one, about student failure: "This was the way I had viewed my own education. When I did poorly, I blamed my own lack of effort, not flaws in the pedagogy."

"More realistic view. When students fail it is often due to inappropriate pedagogy. Substantial improvements were produced (see above) even in classes traditionally regarded as necessarily difficult, among them calculus, physics, chemistry, and economics. This is not to say that students have no responsibility for their own work. Rather, we have grossly underemphasized the faculty members' responsibilities."

And here are his comments about number two, on lecture as a teaching method: "I certainly believed this enthusiastically. Hadn't the lecture method worked for me?"

*“Rose (1990) convinced me that unintended discrimination is inherent in any assumption that students should come to us knowing how to read the way we want them to read, how to write the way we want them to write, and generally how to do the various tasks required to excel in our courses properly.”*



## Continued from page 1

Wasn't it the approach embraced by all of my under-graduate science professors and by most of those I had in other fields? Wasn't it the main method used by my colleagues?”

“More realistic view. In a paper that partially foreshadowed this one, ‘Living with Myths: Undergraduate Education in America,’ Terenzini and Pascarella (1994) stated, ‘the evidence we reviewed is clear’ that the lecture mode ‘is not ineffective’ (p. 29). Remember that in introductory physics, classes taught with traditional lectures usually learn about 23 percent of what they collectively missed on the pretest (Hake,

1998). Lectures do indeed teach something. Terenzini and Pascarella (1994) continued: ‘But the evidence is equally clear that these conventional methods are not as effective as some other far less frequently used methods’ (p. 29). The comparison, still from physics, is that alternative methods teach on average twice as much as traditional lectures (Hake, 1998).”

I conclude this week with his comments on number five, about bias in instruction with diverse students: “When I

attended my first workshops on cultural and other biases in college teaching, I was shocked at the idea that courses such as calculus, physics, and biology were thought to be anything but nearly fully objective in both content and pedagogy.”

“More realistic view. Traditional methods of instruction favor students who have had multiple AP courses and have otherwise had the exceptional preparation for college offered by elite high schools. In addition, many or most such students come from well-off families, families that also have high expectations for academic success.”

“Rose (1990) convinced me that unintended discrimination is inherent in any assumption that students should come to us knowing how to read the way we want them to read, how to write the way we want them to write, and generally how to do the various tasks required to excel in our courses properly. Treisman's work (see above) convince me that even well-prepared students (high math SATs) are often disadvantaged by high school experiences that lead them to work alone. My own high school math

teacher taught us that checking your homework with another student is cheating. It was a shock to find Treisman describing years later my solitary approaches to studying. It was an even greater shock to find him suggesting that if faculty didn't like the usual levels achieved by less-privileged students, they needed to build the social support required for learning.”

Nelson's ideas and findings will certainly challenge many of our deeply-held beliefs. I have varying levels of agreement and disagreement with him on several of these. Next week, I will look at part two of the test, as well as offer some commentary. But I hope this little true-false test provides some food for thought.



## XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)

Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> Or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: [kosterj@winthrop.edu](mailto:kosterj@winthrop.edu) The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>



## A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or [birdj@winthrop.edu](mailto:birdj@winthrop.edu).

Join XXITE 2.0 or  
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## Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

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and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

## Thought for The Week

"Behold the fool saith, 'Put not all thine eggs in the one basket'--which is but a manner of saying, 'Scatter your money and your attention;' but the wise man saith, 'Put all your eggs in the one basket and WATCH THAT BASKET.'"

--Mark Twain